

Retention Tip Sheet

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- Retention begins when you have accurately described the volunteer position and assessed whether the potential volunteer is right for the job. Hence, **retention begins in the interview process**. Tune in to the volunteer's main reason for volunteering and honor this throughout his/her time with you.
- Retention refers to the volunteer's adherence to the initial **contract agreement**. If a volunteer is asked to commit 4 hours a week for a six month period, and the volunteer leaves after 6 months, it can be said that the retention was successful.
- There are several key components in a volunteer program that enhance retention. These are: placement, orientation, training, supervision, evaluation, and recognition.
- **Placement** refers to the position that is assigned and agreed to by the volunteer. This might be a standardized job or a newly created job that matches the skills, interests, and availability of the particular volunteer. It is important that a **job description** is constructed and a **contract** is signed.
- The **orientation** is important in allowing the volunteer to feel as though he/she is part of the agency and ensure he/she understands the agency on a larger level. An orientation should cover the agency's history, mission, programs, population served, staff introductions, and volunteer program basics. Include a tour of the agency and point out locations of office equipment and supplies if these are relevant to the position.
- Volunteers have the right to be given **training** for the tasks required of the position. Even if the volunteer is a consultant and already has the skills necessary, she/he must still be offered clear directions and timelines for how the activity is to be completed. Volunteers must know what is expected of them, both in their product and delivery of that product.
- If extensive training is required, it is helpful to create group training experiences over a full day or weekend. This allows the volunteers to learn together and support one another through the process. It also allows volunteers to get to know one another and make friends at the agency.
- Use as many different training techniques as possible such as: lecture, on-the-job demonstration, written material, role-playing, etc. [Note that adults learn best when they have practical and experiential modes of learning. Ask for their input and allow them to practice and offer immediate feedback.]
- The training should also explain the method of **supervision** — so that volunteers understand to whom they should turn with a question or for feedback — as well as how the supervisor will be evaluating the work.
- Supervision can be handled as check-in meetings, ongoing informal discussion, or written reports. It is important to set up "checkpoints" along the way.
- Make sure that the volunteers have all the **resources** necessary to complete the job.

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- Incorporate **evaluations** both *of* the volunteer and *by* the volunteer. Volunteers have a right to grow professionally and therefore require constructive feedback of their work. They also have a right to let you know how you and the agency can better support them in doing their work.
- Provide authentic on-going **recognition** of the volunteer both verbally and concretely.